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Tips for Teachers - Enrichment

MEETING THE NEEDS OF GIFTED LEARNERS IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM

By Cathy Telfer

Many characteristics of bright students, and many of the skills to be developed are also characteristics and skills of teachers who are most suited to guide gifted learners.

Be alert to those students who don't display "schoolhouse giftedness" but who have potential, who demonstrate "creative/productive behaviours" in other settings and who, as a result, require differentiated learning experiences beyond what is expected in a specific grade or curriculum.

These tips are offered, not with a focus on teaching, but with a focus on learning and its relationship with teaching.

Enrichment is not elitist:

Enrichment is available to all

- Provide opportunities for students to select from a variety of assignments
- Guide students to appropriate tasks from the choices offered
- Establish criteria with students before they begin
- Consider learning styles and multiple intelligences when designing programs

Enrichment is not for everyone:

Enrichment is individualized

- If all students can complete tasks with equal ease and quality, the task probably will not challenge many gifted learners
- Offer students the option to participate and provide choices within assignments
- Consider independent study or personal programs

Enrichment is not consumption of content:

Enrichment is creation of concepts

- Consider how students relate what is learned to previous information and experience.
- Consider a KWL chart - ie:
K = What I Know;
W = What I want to learn;
L = What I learned.

Enrichment is not more of the same:

Enrichment is differentiated to extend learning - not just "different" but differentiated as suited to talents, interests and abilities.

- If assignments completed quickly are followed with work of similar nature (or even the same work with different numbers or examples), students quickly learn to hold back or hide completed work until others have finished, or to settle for mediocre quality
- Seek student input re interests, possibilities
- Students may complete an interest inventory.

Enrichment does not penalize bright students:

Enrichment stimulates, encourages and challenges bright students.

- Few students will work harder for less reward; if work is more challenging but their marks drop, students may settle for easier work of questionable value.
- Offer anecdotal or reflective comments in place of marks for creative work and selected products.
- Consider a learning contract.
- Investigate "negotiated learning".

Enrichment is not additional work or work from the next grade:

Enrichment is an integral part of the program

- Although acceleration is one form of challenge for gifted learners, it is not the only solution, nor is it appropriate for all students.
- Consider curriculum compacting, with time saved used for enrichment.
- Planning should account for individual learning styles and needs.

Enrichment is not separate entity learning:

Enrichment is interrelationships

- Gifted learners have advanced ability to see connections between concepts and also connections to the ideas of others.
- Teach use of graphic organizers, such as webbing or mind maps.
- Offer opportunities for students to investigate unique solutions or "off the wall" connections.

Enrichment is not following prescribed curriculum:

Enrichment is following off-shoots of the curriculum

- Provide or be open to extensions from the curriculum content.
- Allow students to investigate a topic or in greater depth or breadth.
- Find ways to integrate skills and expectations from more than one subject area.

Enrichment is not totally different from the curriculum:

Enrichment is related to concepts and themes within the curriculum

- Consider big understandings, ie: those concepts that are universal and transferable and have a broad base of understanding.

Enrichment is not reproductive thinking:

Enrichment is productive thinking

- Stress creative responses where appropriate.
- Encourage students to brainstorm, to think of lots of different ideas, to “freewheel,” to “piggyback” on the ideas of others and to suspend judgement during the brainstorming.
- Use the productive thinking model in which students develop ideas with fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration.

Enrichment is not acceptance of data collected

Enrichment is problem seeking and solving

- Teach research skills with a framework such as the basic inquiry model.
- As students mature, provide different research frameworks of increasing complexity.
- Teach students to use primary sources and a variety of media to access for information.
- Help students to combine and balance creative thinking with critical thinking.
- Talk to students about how they think – ie. metacognitive styles or “thinking about thinking”.
- Learn more about a framework for Creative Problem Solving

Enrichment does not ask questions to which all students have the same answers

Enrichment asks open-ended questions leading to creative and divergent thinking

- Begin questions with:
What would happen if...?...
In what ways might we...?
Suppose...
- Provide opportunities for students to use analogies and metaphors.
- Assist students, not just with answering questions, but also with how to ask effective questions.

Enrichment is not booklets tied with strings

Enrichment is presenting information in many different ways to appropriate audiences

- Expect students to go beyond completing an assignment and handing it in for the teacher to mark.
- Other students are enriched when new and unique learning is shared.
- An audiences (classmates, other students, parents, community) encourages students to develop and share
- Some students may need help in bringing investigations to a conclusion or keeping to a schedule.

Enrichment is not a series of projects:

Enrichment is a variety of products

- Encourage a variety of media and forms, eg.:
Audio: chalk-talk or debate.
Visual: journals, logs, model or illustration.
Multi-media: video or computer presentation.

Enrichment is not a variety of activities

Enrichment is planned, purposeful engagement in learning

- Know what you want students to know and plan how to get there.
- Consider how you will know they have fulfilled the expectations by setting criteria for a culminating activity.
- Explain assessment criteria with students before they begin work.
- Balance individual, small group and whole class instruction.
- Offer opportunities for heterogeneous groupings for gifted learners to work with age and social peers as well as homogeneous groupings to provide time for gifted learners to work with intellectual peers.
- Provide opportunities for students to demonstrate “stick-to-it-iveness” or intense concentration when they have a passion for a topic or area of study.

Enrichment is not learning things as they are:

Enrichment is considering things as they should and could be

- Value the dreamer with sometimes far-fetched ideas.
- Allow a free-flow of ideas for individuals and small groups.
- Encourage students to think of the future.
- Give students and a variety of fiction – make-believe and fantasy stories and poetry.

Enrichment is not packaged:

Enrichment is responsive to needs and situations

- No kit or program will do all that you want it to, even if “enrichment” is stamped on the cover.
- Be alert to possibilities.

- Seek ideas from parents and community members as well as from students.
- Be a risk-taker as well as valuing risk-taking in students.

Enrichment is not courses of study:

Enrichment is strategies

- Focus on process and learning to learn skills, such as:
Research
Decision making
Brainstorming
Social skills

Enrichment is not always planned:

Enrichment is the outcome of instruction and interest

- Talk to students about their responsibility for their own learning and the importance of setting goals.
- Up-date the interest inventory as students mature and their interests change.
- Consider the teacher's role as facilitator and guide.

Enrichment is not the responsibility only of the teacher:

Enrichment is the shared responsibility between teacher, school, home and community

- Establish opportunities and time for enrichment.
- Offer a wide variety of experiences, topics and themes.
- Provide opportunities for students to share exemplary products with community members.
- Encourage mentoring - to match students with adults with expertise and interest in an area beyond the curriculum.
- Include the community by sharing your philosophy, plans and dreams for gifted learners in the classroom.

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